

Week Ending Friday, April 11, 1997

The President's Radio Address

April 5, 1997

Good morning. I want to talk with you today about how we can make this glorious spring a season of service all across America. As I have said many times, the era of big Government may be over, but the era of big challenges for our Nation is surely not. Citizen service is the main way we recognize that we are responsible for one another. It is the very American idea that we meet our challenges not through heavyhanded Government or as isolated individuals but as members of a true community, with all of us working together.

On April 27th through 29th, at Independence Hall in Philadelphia, we will be convening an historic President's Summit on Service. I will be joined by President Bush, General Colin Powell, by every living former President or his representative, by other prominent Americans, including former HUD Secretary Henry Cisneros and Lynda Robb. Every person, business, or organization represented at the summit will have already committed to take specific steps to help to serve our children and to rebuild our communities. Our mission is nothing less than to spark a renewed national sense of obligation, a new sense of duty, a new season of service.

I hope that many activities in the weeks leading up to this wonderful event will make all Americans think about the duty all of us owe to one another. Citizen service can take many shapes. It can mean volunteering nights or on weekends in a religious group or neighborhood association or devoting full years of your life to service like those the Peace Corps or the Jesuit Volunteer Corps members do.

Over the past 4 years, we have worked to harness this citizen energy in so many ways. I am especially proud of AmeriCorps, the national service program I proposed when I ran

for President, that we launched the very next year. Since its creation, 50,000 young people have earned college tuition by serving their communities, with the basic bargain of getting the opportunity to go to college in return for giving something back to their friends and neighbors.

The success of AmeriCorps shows that service can help to meet our most pressing social needs, from renewing our cities to protecting our environment, to immunizing poor children, to giving them mentors and someone to look up to. And that service often leads to more service; a typical AmeriCorps member trains or recruits a dozen or more community volunteers.

To focus the American people on the importance of this summit and the urgency of service, I'll issue a proclamation designating the week of April 13th through 19th as National Service Week in America. During that week, over a million young people will participate in 3,000 events across our Nation, cleaning up neighborhoods and working with children.

I've asked the thousands of AmeriCorps alumni and returned Peace Corps volunteers to participate as well, reaching out to youth in their communities, speaking in schools, recruiting volunteers, and teaching a new generation about the power of service. I'm very pleased that some of them have joined our Peace Corps Director, Mark Gearan, here with me today.

I hope that they will teach that citizen service cannot be a pursuit for just a week or a month, that the ethic of service must extend throughout a lifetime. No one is too young to serve. As a recent study by Brandeis University shows, when you begin to serve at a young age, schoolwork improves, and there is a good chance you will continue to serve in the years to come. It's a good habit that's hard to break. And no one is too old to serve, either. But we must find even more ways to

encourage our young people to begin to serve.

I'm joined here today by some young men and women from Maryland, along with that State's Lieutenant Governor, Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, who has been a leader in making Maryland the first State in our Nation to require that every student perform some service as a condition of high school graduation. One of the students meeting with me gathered food and clothing for the needy; another, dyslexic herself, taught disabled students; another tutors young children at a Head Start center.

Today I challenge schools and communities in every State to make service a part of the curriculum in high school and even in middle school. There are many creative ways to do this, including giving students credit, making service part of the curriculum, putting service on a student's transcript or even requiring it, as Maryland does. This week, the National Association of Secondary School Principals agreed to introduce service learning to more than 2 million students, and I hope they'll work to find even more creative ways to involve service. States and schools, of course, should be free to decide this for themselves. But every young American should be taught the joy and duty of serving and should learn it at the moment when it will have the most enduring impact on the rest of their lives.

Two weeks ago, applications went out to high school principals all around our Nation, inviting them to select a student in that school who has performed outstanding service, thereby making them eligible for a \$1,000 scholarship. Under this new initiative, which we launched last year, our National Government will put up \$500 for each student if it is matched by local communities. Already, a host of civic organizations, including the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Moose International, the Lions Clubs, the U.S. Jaycees, have accepted our challenge to work with their local chapters to provide matching funds for these scholarships. And public servants from agencies like the Agriculture Department will continue to work as partners with these schools, sending volunteers to work with teachers and acting as mentors to the students.

I hope all of you will join in the spirit of the Presidents' Summit on Service, and take part in the National Week of Service beginning April 13th. Service is in our deepest national tradition. Millions of young Americans in my generation were inspired by the call to service, issued so often from this very office, by President Kennedy. Now it is up to all of us to take up President Kennedy's challenges, remembering, as he said, that every person can make a difference, and every person must try.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. from the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Lynda Robb, wife of Senator Charles S. Robb.

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of Israel

April 7, 1997

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, how dangerous is the standoff between Israel and the Palestinians?

The President. Well, I think it's very important to get this peace process back on track. The Prime Minister is coming here at a very good time. As you know, he saw King Hussein the other day; I did, too. And I want to have this chance to spend an hour with him to discuss what we can do to get it going again.

Q. Mr. President, will you be amenable to hosting a peace conference at Camp David, as the Prime Minister has suggested?

The President. Well, I think it's important not to jump the gun on that. The first thing we have to do is get the process going again. There is a preexisting process. There are a whole lot of agreements. And the Prime Minister has got some ideas about what we can do to get the substance working.

Obviously, I've been heavily involved in this from the day I became President. I continue to be heavily involved, and I wouldn't rule out any reasonable opportunity for me to make a positive contribution. But we have to have the conditions and the understandings necessary to go forward. That's the most